

Q and A Emergency Winter Shelter

After an exhaustive review of potential appropriate properties across Wichita, the City and partners have located a suitable, temporary winter emergency shelter for this year. There is an urgent need to get the shelter ready to serve homeless residents as soon as possible. For context, 48 unhoused individuals died during the winter months last year.

This is not a long term solution, but is the best option after a thorough review of temporary facility sites. It's crucial we worked quickly to help protect the lives of unhoused residents this winter.

Where is it?

The City owns the property at 2220 E. 21st Street, N, the site of the former Fundamental Learning Center. The City bought the land from Heartspring in 1995 and the building was built in 1996 when Cessna and the City entered into a develop agreement and lease to construct two buildings at 2130 and 2220 E. 21st Street. The building at 2130 was developed as a subassembly facility and training site. The building at 2220 was developed as a life skill training facility and day care. Cessna operated the buildings for these purposes for several years until the program was relocated to its main facility when business slowed due to the recession. Cessna leased them through November 2017.

How big is the facility? How many can it serve?

The building is nearly 20,000 sq feet and could accommodate approximately 250 individuals. There is need for up to 250 beds for homeless individuals in Wichita this winter.

Is it secure and safe for the surrounding community?

The property is fenced and the building will maintain a single, monitored entry point. There will be two, 24/7 security personnel on premises. Access to the building will require bag checks and passing through metal detectors. There will be fenced perimeter. Security will patrol both interior and exterior areas. Daily trash pickup will keep the inside/outside of the facility clean. WPD is considering utilizing outdoor cameras. The WPD's Homeless Outreach Team is also evaluating the facility to add lighting and other safety features. HumanKind's experience over the last two decades indicates rare criminal activity with the winter shelter. Research also shows unhoused individuals are more often the victims of violent crime than the perpetrators. In 2022, HumanKind's winter shelter had five altercations requiring assistance.

How will it be operated?

HumanKind will operate the facility and work closely with other partner human service

resources that will provide other services and counseling at that location.

How long will it be in service?

The shelter will operate for approximately 22 weeks until the end of March 2024.

This is not a permanent site but will serve the community's interests through this winter. The City is committed to finding another appropriate site for future winter shelter facilities until a permanent site is finalized.

Will the facility be used past March of 2024?

No. There is an active request for proposal out for redevelopment of the facility that staff is working on – priority use for the facility would hopefully go to a social service program. But the facility will not be available for use past March 2024. Staff is already working on a plan for next year. The multi-agency center (MAC) will not open until 2025 at the earliest.

How long has the City been working on this?

Staff have been looking for a shelter since summer. Staff were alerted by HumanKind in September they would not be able to operate their winter shelter due to capacity. Staff began evaluating different locations immediately. Eight locations were downtown or downtown adjacent. On October 16, staff became aware the 21st site was available.

Building classification and fire safety systems as well as HVAC systems in other facilities that were looked at could not be updated in time to provide service in time for cold weather conditions. Other facilities did not have enough capacity, bathrooms, security features and could not be renovated in time for this winter.

Once the site was identified as viable, outreach began in late October. City housing staff delivered flyers to nearby residents and began talks with area businesses - on October 30, media ran a story about shelter plans after learning preliminary information, which moved up the timeline to announce.

What about meals and other services? Transit?

Three daily meals will be provided on site.

Mobile shower services are being looked into.

Wichita Transit will provide fare-free rides along the adjacent route

Is HumanKind an experienced operator of shelter services?

For more than 100 years, HumanKind has offered shelter services. Their previous campus that operated the winter shelter is in a residential area in Midtown, which is close to two local schools and businesses and has had few security issues. Other operators will be onsite to help provide services including the City of Wichita, Hunter Health, Open Door, the Substance Abuse Center of Kansas and more.

How much would it cost?

There is no impact to the City's general fund. The winter shelter costs will be funded through ARPA funds from revenue replacement funds. The City will allocate a maximum of \$685,000 of ARPA funds. The city expects that other community partners will contribute to lessen the city's funding amount.

HumanKind will be providing approximately \$200,000 in funding. This will cover supplies, equipment, beds, and set-up and other preparations to open the facility and operational costs. Beyond that, local government and other funding will provide for staffing and associated costs, including:

- 35 – 40 fulltime, parttime and as-needed staff members
- Security, utilities, and food services, just to name a few

When will it open?

The shelter will open as soon as building safety considerations have been addressed, including adding more smoke and CO2 detectors, and the facilities can be staffed and equipped (cots and other supplies have to be delivered for example).

Plans are being established to provide an interim solution.

What is the HOT Team doing?

During periods when weather forecasts call for temperatures to fall abnormally below daily averages HOT will suspend normal daily operations and only focus its resources on educational outreach directed at locations typically overlooked such as outlying area overpasses and bridges. Their effort will be to guide the unhoused toward shelter operations.

HOT will continue partnering with community groups in receiving and distributing hats, gloves, socks, hygiene kits, and non-perishable food.

HOT will also educate the community that the Union Rescue Mission will be picking homeless up from downtown and taking them to their shelter. URM will also stay open during extreme cold days.

HOT will disseminate an educational email to all commissioned personnel containing this information with links to the brochure and flyer.

HOT will distribute 200 fliers and 200 brochures to each patrol bureau which will list resources including public facilities, free food and shelter options, phone services, transit and more.

How can the community help?

The emergency shelter needs hundreds of volunteers over the next several months – medical personnel as well as those interested in serving meals, operating our clothing closets, or generally assisting our clients and staff. The shelter can also use donations of food, clothing, and other services. We encourage local businesses, individuals, and other non-profits to join with us to make a difference. If you'd like to volunteer your time or donate food, supplies or funding, please contact HumanKind at humankindwichita.org/getinvolved

How are we working to better communicate?

We are in the process of creating an Emergency Shelter Stakeholder Engagement Council that will meet bi-weekly to hear updates from HumanKind and the City about the shelter and any adverse activity in the neighborhood as well as responses and plans to improve community relations, communications and safety. If you would like to serve on the council, send an email to social@Wichita.gov.